

Empty Homes Research in North West England

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Policy background

- England facing the biggest housing crisis in a generation, with a 1.8m shortfall in social housing
- Need to build 240,000 homes per annum to keep pace with rising housing demand
- At the same time over 635,000 residential properties currently lying vacant
- Empty homes have potential to make significant contribution to gap in housing supply

Policy background

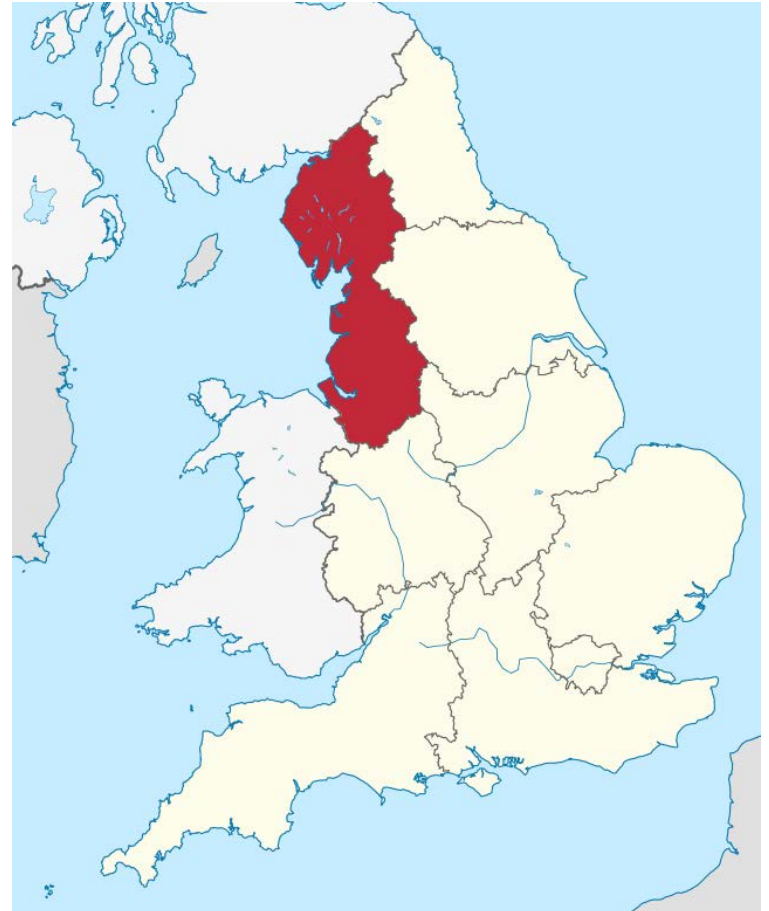
- In 2012 UK Government announced £100m Affordable Homes Programme
- Funding programme offering new solutions to return empty homes back into use
- However, little is known about empty home owners
- Local government failing to engage with owners to link them with this new support

The study

- Two-year project in Greater Manchester, NW England
- Understanding who owners are and their experiences of owning an empty home
- Determining services and support required by owners
- Improving engagement with empty home owners
- Supporting owners to return properties back into use

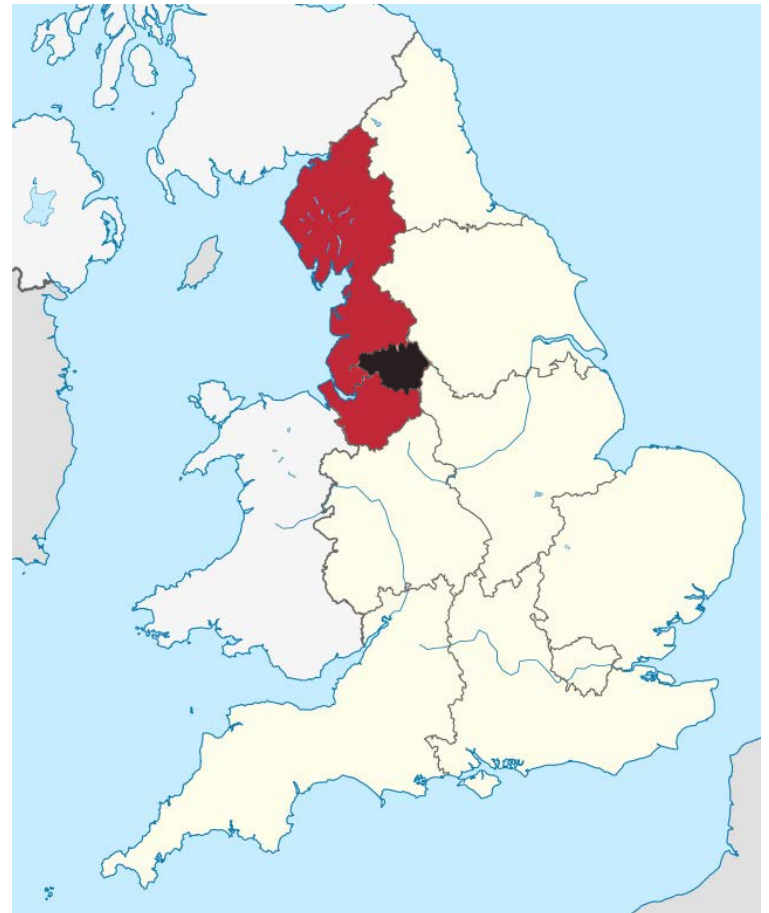
North West England

- Three million households
- 3.8% of housing stock empty (compared to 2.8% national average)
- Private rented sector grown by 54.2% between 2001-11



Greater Manchester

- Comprises ten local authority districts
- Over one million households
- 3.2% of housing stock empty (37,000 homes)
- Private rented sector grown by 62.6% between 2001-11



Greater Manchester

- 60% houses owner occupied
- 22% social rented households
- 16% are privately rented
- 2% other accommodation types



Tameside

- Study pilot area
- 95,000 households
- 2.97% of housing stock empty (2,900 homes)
- Need to build 600+ homes per annum to meet housing demand (currently only building 350/year)
- Private rented sector grown by 43.8% between 2001-11
- Rented sector accounts for 13.2% of local housing



Current engagement practices

- Local government often the sole broker between empty home owners and available support
- Current service designs are built around enforcement
 - Authorities responding reactively to problem of empty homes
 - Where pro-active, often targeting worst offending properties
 - Enforcement serving to disengage owners
 - Communication to empty home owners is not targeted

Current engagement practices



Economic Growth, Investment & Sustainability

Robin Monk
Executive Director

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Room 1.41, Council Offices, Wellington Road
Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside OL6 6DL
www.tameside.gov.uk

Ask for: Jim Davies
Direct Line: 0161 342 3308
Fax: 0161 342 2868

email: jim.davies@tameside.gov.uk

Your Ref: Q/EH/Questionnaire
Our Ref: EHLetJune13
Doc Ref: 05 July 2013
Date:

Dear Empty Home Owner,

Tameside Empty Homes Initiative

I am writing to you because at 01 April 2013 you have been identified from our Council Tax data base as being the owner of a property that has been empty for 6 months or more. It is possible that your property may have been let or sold in the intervening period in which case, please accept my apologies for having troubled you however I would be grateful if you could take the time to advise me so that I can amend my records.

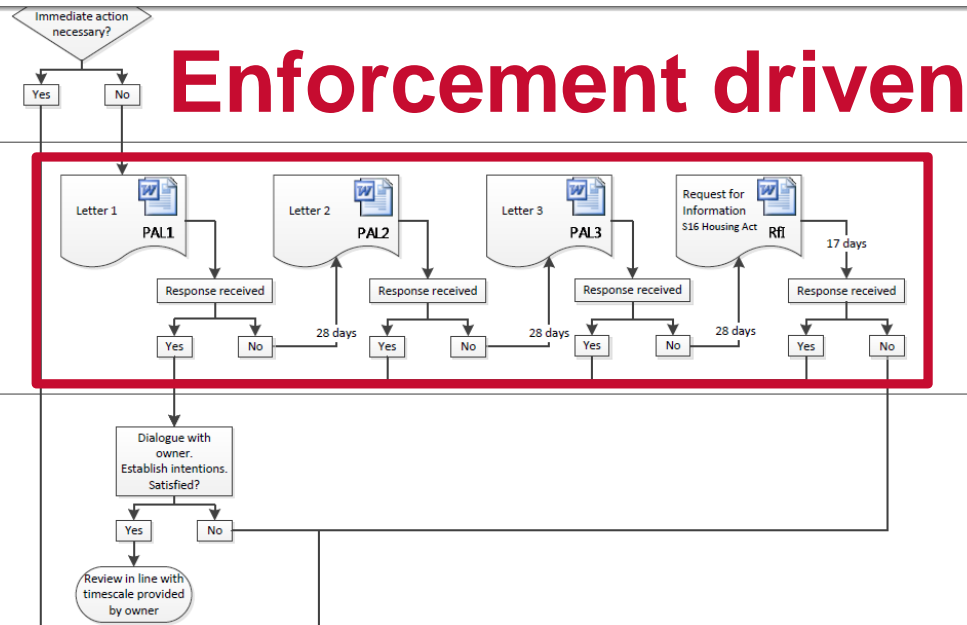
We have nearly 1000 empty residential properties in Tameside, whilst at the same time a shortage of good quality and well managed affordable housing for local families. We realise that homes are empty for a diverse range of reasons:

- Most empty home owners are trying to sell their properties but market conditions are making this difficult
- You might live outside Tameside and need help finding a tenant and managing the property
- We know that many people may have inherited a property that is in poor condition and are unsure about what to do with it
- You may need access to finance to undertake the necessary repairs that would enable you to bring the property back into use
- Or perhaps you have had a bad experience managing the property yourself.

It could also be the case that you have noticed a substantial increase in your Council Tax bill for your empty property. The decision was taken that an empty property would be subject to a 100% Council Tax charge from the 1st April 2013 and should a property remain empty for more than two years it would then become subject to an additional premium of 50%. It may be that you also need advice on housing options in dealing with this situation.

To try and tackle these problems, the Council is working on several initiatives to bring empty properties back into use with two locally based Housing Associations. The first is in

- Formal, impersonal, letter-driven process
- Fails to capture attention and encourage positive discourse



Findings - who are empty home owners?

- Using Council Tax as primary intelligence tool

Empty Homes Data Dashboard

100,000 social housing waiting list **32,000 empty homes in Greater Manchester**

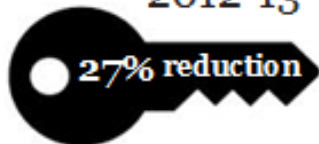


Empty Homes in Tameside

2010: 3,799

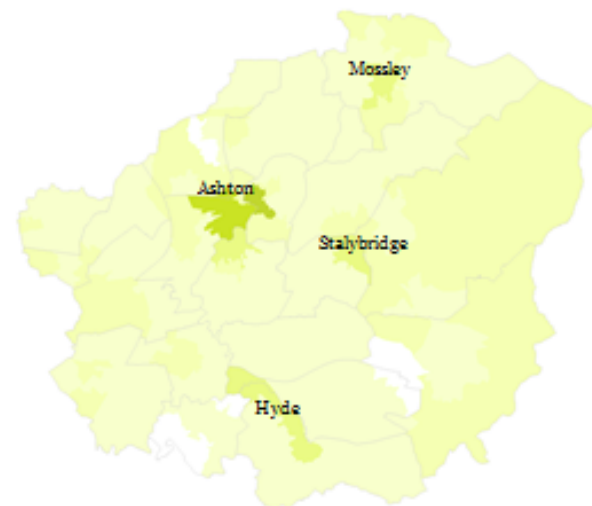
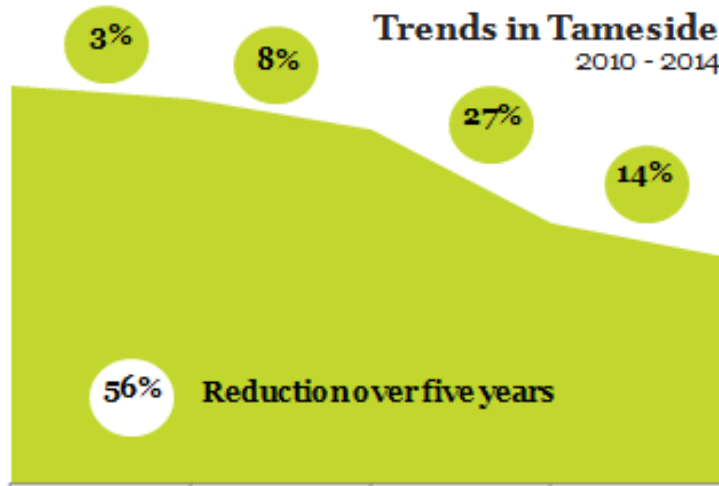
2014: 2,144

2012-13



Trends in Tameside

2010 - 2014



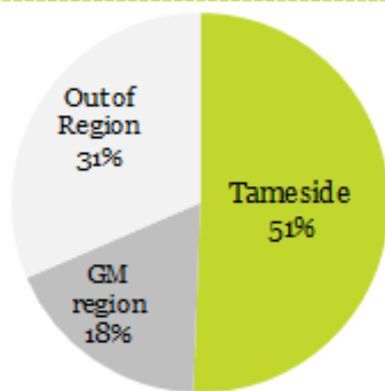
Apr-13 150% Council Tax Premium for long-term empties introduced



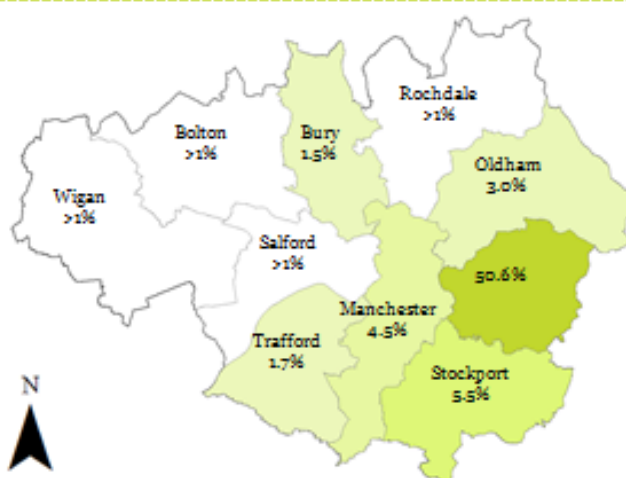
Tameside Empty Home Owners*



Empty Home hotspots in Tameside Apr-2013
density of empty homes



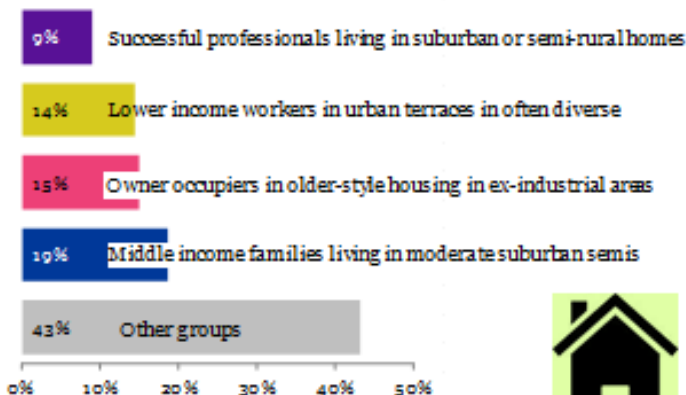
Location



*where addresses are known

Tameside owner characteristics

who reside in GM



(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)

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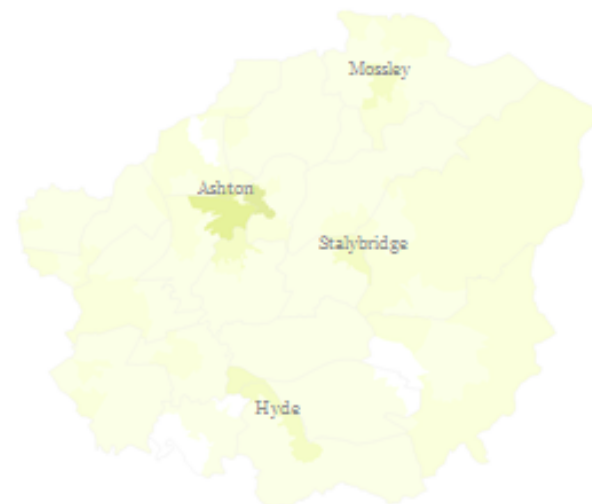
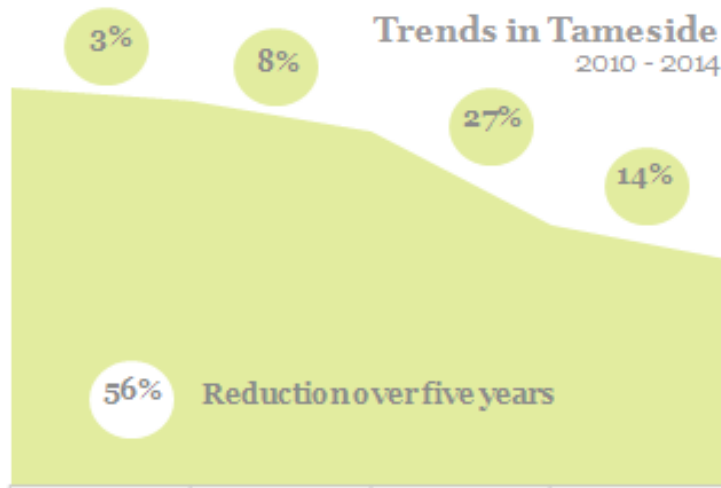
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2012-13

27% reduction

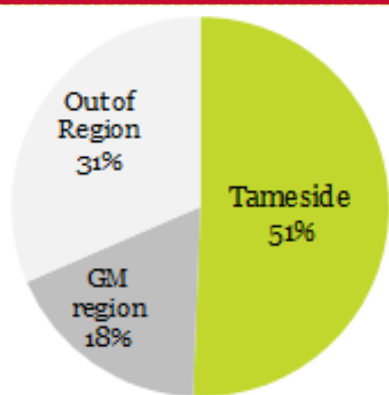
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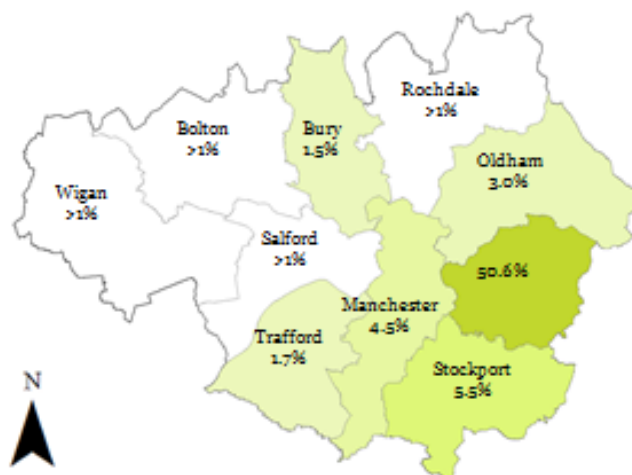


70% live within Greater Manchester

meside Apr-2013
nes



Location



*where addresses are known

Mainly in the borough where they own their empty home

(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)

Empty Homes Data Dashboard

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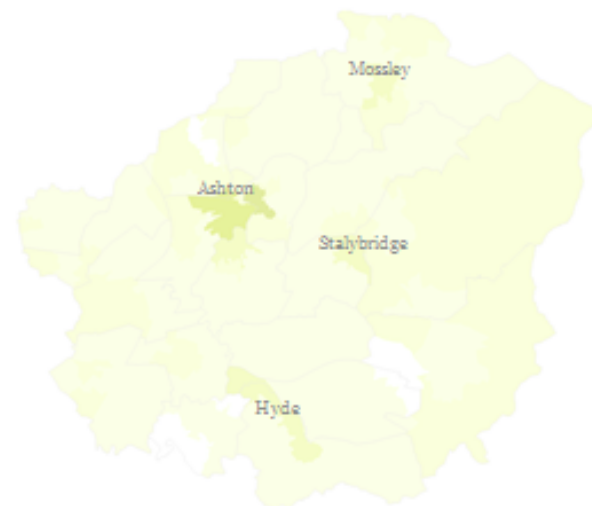
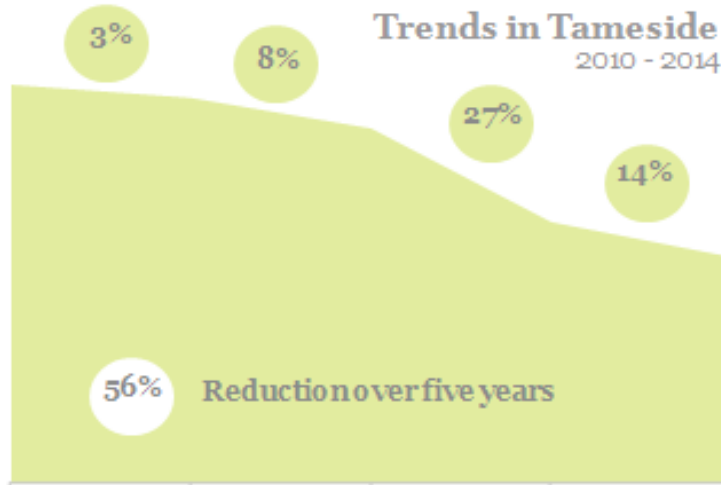
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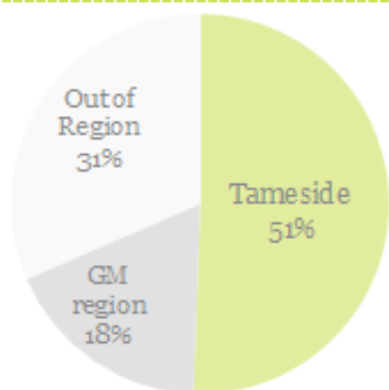


Tameside Empty Home Owners*

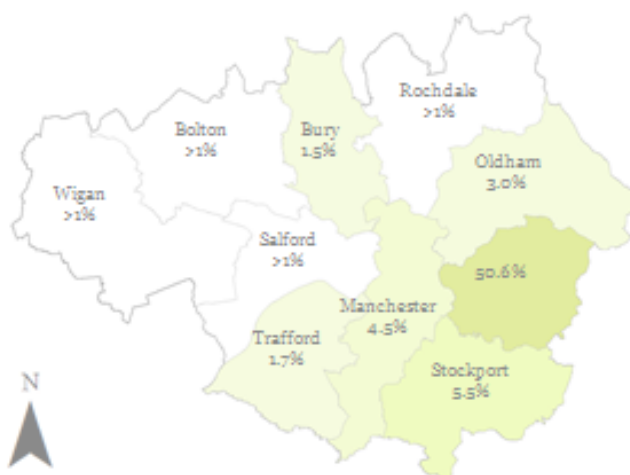


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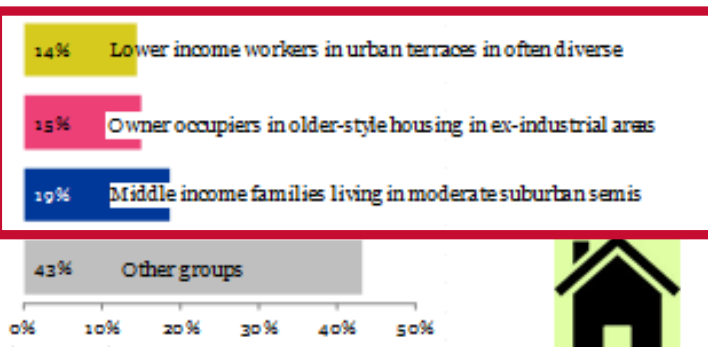
15% are on lower incomes



Location



*where addresses are known



(Tameside MBC Council Tax, April 2013)

Findings - who are empty home owners?

- Owners are not an homogenous group
 - Inconsistent and irrational in their decision-making
 - Do not identify themselves as an *empty home owner*
- Empty home ownership is a lonely, negative experience
- Owners develop hypothetical scenarios to justify inaction - e.g. perceived *hassle* of being a landlord

Findings - who are empty home owners?

- Inertia of owners, go with the default option
- Do not necessarily follow financial motive
- Emotional attachment to properties
- Cannot afford to sell
- More likely to be aged 55+

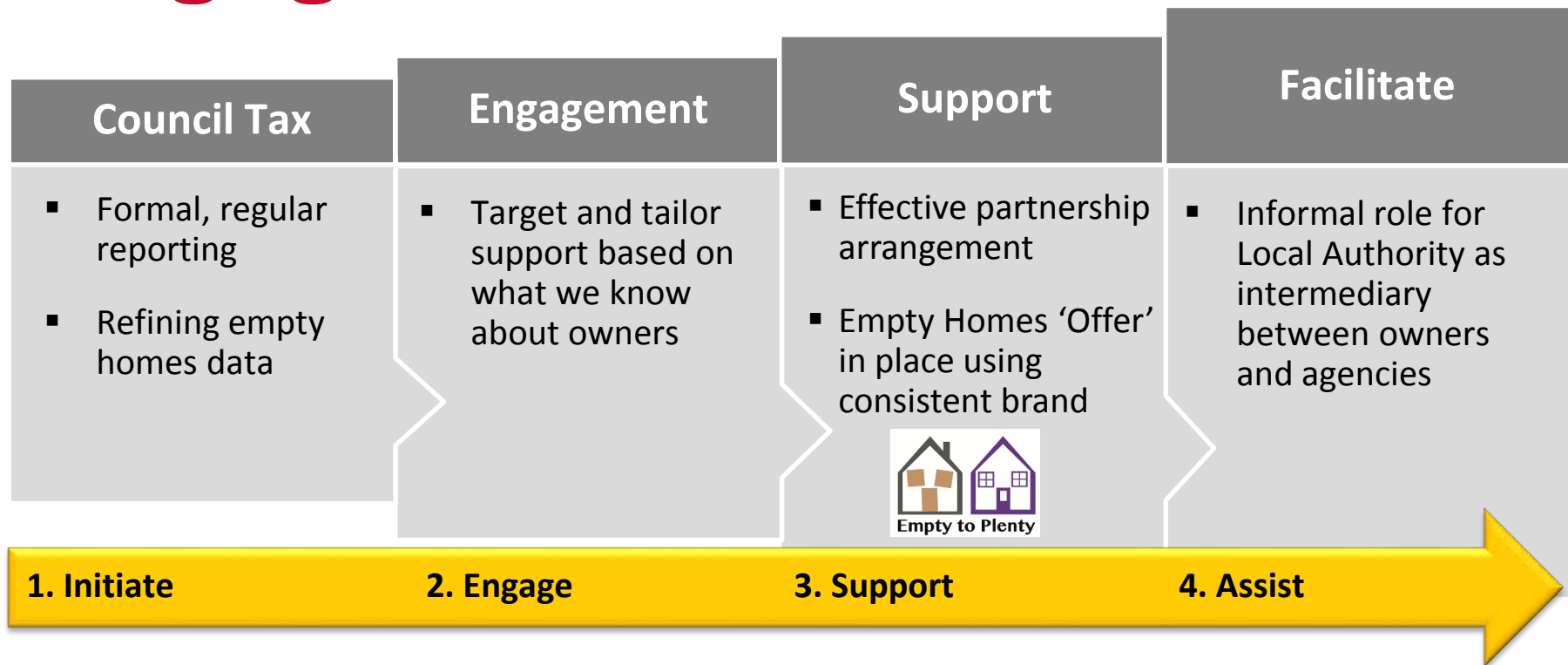
Findings - owner's service needs

- Owners trust Council, first point of call for advice
- Important Council delivers communication
- Online (website, social media) can play important role for information provision
- Owners want signposting to support, having all options in one place
- Timely, effective communication
- Demand for Council in an 'honest broker' position

Applying findings

- Redesigned empty homes service based on findings
- Shifting emphasis from an ineffective enforcement led, regulatory approach
- Move towards an incentivised, choice driven programme
- Target empty homes support based on what we know about owners
 - E.g. 90% of homes empty for less than two years. Potential 'quick wins', with owners needing signposting to support

Applying findings - new engagement model



Research impact

- Research underpinned the development of new empty home owner engagement model
- Increase engagement rates from less than 1% to 6% in six months
- Model has been embedded at regional level
- Endorsed in Greater Manchester Housing Strategy and Empty Homes Programme 2015-18

Impact in Tameside

- 1,800 hits on dedicated empty homes website
- 140 owners attended Empty Homes support event
- 120 owners sought advice from Empty Homes team
- 70 empty homes brought back into use in Tameside
- £400k generated for Council through New Homes Bonus







Thank you

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